

# Celebrate the opening of a library at our mall

Jane Varner Beard, Abilene 6:58 a.m. CST November 17, 2016



(Photo: Courtesy photo)

My father was born in a tent in Ranger on a cold day in December 1919. His parents, who had only third-grade educations, had traveled on flatbed rail cars from their native Oklahoma with their team of mules hoping to find work delivering drilling equipment from the railhead to oil well sites throughout Eastland County.

My father and his family eventually returned to Oklahoma, where he was raised in a series of oilfield camps. Moving often, his education was fragmented and limited by the financial stress of the Great Depression. The only reading material in his home was the King James version of the Bible.

Many of my father's classmates and acquaintances from those years fell into the trap of alcohol, indolence and crime. I once asked him how he had escaped the fate of so many of his contemporaries. He credited his wonderful parents and the window to the world provided by reading.

"A neighbor who lived a couple of miles down the road from us subscribed to National Geographic magazine," he told me. "She would let me walk over and sit on her floor and read the magazines. National Geographic

showed me there was a much bigger world out there. I survived because I realized there could be a bigger future for me than the one I could see in front of me at that moment."

The generous neighbor's collection of National Geographic magazines was my father's public library in the 1930s. It opened his eyes, brain and heart to a world of possibilities that he otherwise wouldn't have known existed.

My childhood public library included books, periodicals and newspapers, all of which could be found through the technological wonder known as the card catalog. I spent hours at the branch library in Wichita, Kansas and joined the summer reading club every year. It was there, sitting on the green linoleum floor, that I fell in love with American history and was inspired by heroines such as Amelia Earhart, Clara Barton and Elizabeth Blackwell to pursue college and a law degree. Without that library, my life would have been quite different.

Like the library of my childhood and my father's National Geographic library, the modern public library continues to inspire and provide a portal to a world of possibilities for those with a desire to look and learn. However, a modern library now also serves as the "living room of the community," bringing people together for collaboration, experience and creativity. Our Abilene librarian, Lori Grumet, and her staff have been hard at work providing just such activities.

This past summer, in addition to engaging 4,630 children and 923 teens in a summer reading program, the Abilene Public Library was host to a variety of classes and events, including family friendly movie nights in both Spanish and English, a murder mystery party for teens, the Collecting Commas Writing Club, a monthly Science Club for kids, a children's Paleontology School, and numerous craft opportunities. Adults could take advantage of classes as varied as Resume 101, Senior Fitness, Putting your Business on the Map, QuickBooks, Beginning Genealogy, Beginning Facebook and How to Hold a Successful Garage or Estate Sale.

Albert Einstein once said that "The only thing you absolutely have to know, is the location of the library." Therefore, Abilenians absolutely need to know that the south-side branch of the Abilene Public Library will reopen at 10 a.m. Saturday in the Mall of Abilene, next door to JCPenney.

Accessible from both inside the mall and directly from the adjacent parking lot, the new library is poised to bring innovative resources and programming to adults, teens and children. The mall branch location will include new features such as green screen video technology and the ability to record presentations for broadcast on Cable Television, Channel 2.

It also will have a teen room with dedicated computers and large screen TVs for movies, gaming, and other presentations. Those wanting a quieter atmosphere can enjoy three quiet study rooms and a special quiet reading room. Wireless access will be available for your electronic devices as well as 10 computers for public internet access.

Library cards are free to anyone who lives in Abilene. If you don't already have one, the new south-side branch will have one for you. Stop in and you'll discover, as former First Lady Laura Bush once declared, "The most valuable thing in my wallet is my library card."

*Jane Varner Beard, grants administrator/ attorney at Dian Graves Owen Foundation and a longtime Friend of the Library.*

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